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Message Text

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ACTION HA-05

INFO OCT-01 EA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 INSE-00 CA-01 VO-05
PA-01 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 /046 W
----------046946 140333Z /66
P 140214Z JUN 78
FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 850
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 HONG KONG 7497

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF
SUBJECT: UNHCR REP SAMPATKUMAR VISIT TO HONG KONG

REF: HONG KONG 7360

1. AT REQUEST OF CONSUL GENERAL, SAMPATKUMAR VISITED CONGEN JUNE 12 TO DISCUSS HONG KONG REFUGEE SITUATION. HE REPORTED THAT HE HAD LOCATED ACCOMMODATIONS FOR THE 160 REFUGEES (INCLUDING 65 WHO ARRIVED DURING WEEKEND) WAITING IN SIX JUNKS IN HONG KONG HARBOUR AND THAT THEY WOULD BE LANDED IMMEDIATELY. HE SAID HE WAS ALSO IN PROCESS OF LOCATING ADDITIONAL ACCOMMODATIONS FOR 200-300 FUTURE ARRIVALS AND THESE FACILITIES SHOULD BE AVAILABLE WITHONE ONE WEEK.

2. WHEN CONSUL GENERAL ASKED ABOUT POSSIBILITY OF USING MACAU AS A SPILL-OVER FACILITY FOR HONG KONG REFUGEES, SAMPATKUMAR REPLIED THAT WHEN HE DISCUSSED THIS MATTER WITH MACAU GOVERNOR AND OFFICIALS ON JUNE 5, HE WAS TOLD THAT FACILITIES WOULD HAVE TO BE BUILT. WHEN WE TOLD HIM THAT WAS CONTRARY TO OUR INFORMATION THAT BISHOP OF MACAU HAD EXISTING FACILITIES FOR UP TO 300 REFUGEES WHICH COULD BE MADE READY QUICKLY,
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SAMPATKUMAR SAID THIS HAD NOT BEEN MENTIONED. HE SAID HE PLANNED TO MEET WITH DIRECTOR OF MACAU OFFICE OF CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES (CRS) ON JUNE 13 IN HONG KONG. HE DOES NOT PLAN TO VISIT MACAU ON THIS TRIP BUT WILL PREPARE A WRITTEN PROPOSA AND SEND IT TO CRS FOR PRESENTATION TO MACAU AUTHORITIES. HE EXPLAINED THAT THE GOVERNOR OF MACAU PREFERRED

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THIS PROCEDURE SINCE, IF HE CANNOT AGREE TO THE PROPOSAL, IT WILL BE NEGATIVE REPLY TO CRS RATHER THAN UNHCR.

3. SAMPATKUMAR ASKED IF ICEM OR USG WOULD BE WILLING TO PAY COSTS IN MACAU IF IT IS USED AS SITE FOR THOSE HONG KONG CASES APPROVED FOR U.S. BUT WAITING FOR RECEIPT OF VOLAG ASSURANCES. HE SUGGESTED THAT SUCH REFUGEES COULD BE CONSIDERED TO BE IN TRANSIT TO U.S. WE REPLIED THAT HE WAS TALKING ABOUT A TWO TO THREE MONTH PERIOD AND THAT UNHCR NORMALLY PROVIDES CARE AND MAINTENANCE FUNDS UNTIL REFUGEES REACH COUNTRY OF RESETTLEMENT. SAMPATKUMAR MAY HAVE HAD HEARD FROM GENEVA BOUT DEPARTMENT'S CONSIDERATION (STATE 138458, HONG KONG 6981 AND GENEVA 8721) OF POSSIBILITY OF USING MACAU OR PHILIPPINES AS A LARGE TRANSIT SITE AND MAY HAVE BEEN ATTEMPITNG TO DETERMINE HOW SERIOUSLY WE MAY REGARD MACAU AS A LOCATION FOR SUCH A FACILITY. THE CONSUL GENERAL DID NOT ENCOURAGE SAMPATKUMAR TO THINK THAT ANY USG FUNDS MIGHT BE AVAILABLE FOR CONSTRUCTION IN MACAU.

4. SAMPATKUMAR SAID THAT ICEM HONG KONG HAD DONE EXCELLENT JOB FILLING IN FOR UNHCR HERE, BUT THIS WAS AN INFORMAL ARRANGEMENT AND WITH HIGH REFUGEE CONFIDENTIAL

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ARRIVAL RATE, THE TIME HAD COME FOR UNHCR TO PLAY A MORE ACTIVE AND DIRECT ROLE. HE REPORTED HE HAS OBTAINED AGREEMENT FROM THE HONG KONG GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE AN OFFICE WHICH HE WOULD HOPE TO STAFF WITH A LOCAL EMPLOYEE ON A FULL-TIME BASIS. THIS WOULD BE AN INFORMAL ARRANGEMENT AND NOT A REACTIVATION OF OFFICIAL UNHCR REPRESENTATION. HE AND HIS DEPUTIES WOULD ALSO VISIT HONG KONG MORE OFTEN AND STAY FOR LONGER PERIODS OF TIME. IF THIS ARRANGEMENT WERE PUT INTO EFFECT, UNHCR WOULD MEET NEW BOAT ARRIVALS, COMPLETE BIO FORMS AND LIAISON WITH THIRD COUNTRY REPRESENTATIVES. SAMPATKUMAR ALSO STATED HE WILL TRY TO INTERNATIONALIZE REFUGEE PROCESSING HERE AND INTENDED TO VISIT SEVERAL CONSULTATES/ COMMISSIONS BEFORE LEAVING HONG KONG LATER THIS WEEK.

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----------046966 140332Z /66
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 HONG KONG 7497

5. AN OFFICIAL OF THE HONG KONG IMMIGRATION DEPARTMENT (HKID) TOLD US SUBSEQUENTLY THAT HKG DOES NOT SEE ANY PRC OPPOSITION TO INFORMAL UNHCR OFFICE ARRANGEMENT, WHICH APPARENTLY WILL BE IN HKID BUILDING. HKID SEES THIS POSSIBILITY AS SOLUTION TO SEVERAL PROBLEMS, INCLUDING OBTAINING NORMAL UNHCR CARE AND MAINTENANCE QUARANTEE ON TIMELY BASIS.

6. WHILE WE WILL HAVE TO AWAIT CONCRETE RESULTS, FOR FIRST TIME SAMPATKUMAR APPEARED TO BE COMING TO GRIPS WITH REFUGEE PROBLEMS IN HONG KONG. HIS COMMENTS WERE MORE REALISTIC THAN IN PAST, AND HE APPEARED DETERMINED TO ACHIEVE SOME RESULTS BEFORE RETURNING TO KUALA LUMPUR. A GROUP OF 18 REFUGEES ARRIVED ON JUNE 12 (ANOTHER GROUP OF 38 ON JUNE 13). THEY PROBABLY WILL BE KEPT ON THEIR BOATS UNTIL SAMPATKUMAR FINDS ACCOMMODATIONS FOR THEM. THIS SHOULD ACT AS PUR IN LOCATING MORE ACCOMMODATION FACILITIES.

7. WE HAVE NO INDICATIONS SUPPORTING UNHCR COMMENT, REPORTED IN GENEVA 8721, THAT CHINESE SENSITIVITY
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TO USE OF MACAU AS LARGE TEMPORARY TRANSIT CENTER IS PROBLEM. DURING PAST SEVERAL MONTHS, STORIES HAVE APPEARED IN MACAU PRESS ABOUT THIS POSSIBILITY WITHOUT ADVERSE REACTION FROM PRC. GIVEN CURRENT EXODUS OF ETHNIC CHINESE FROM VIETNAM ACCOMPAINED BY PRC PROPAGANDA ABOUT THEIR PLIGHT, WE BELIEVE THAT

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PRC WOULD NOT RAISE ANY OBJECTIONS TO USE OF MACAU.

8. IF SAMPTAKUMAR HAS HAD WORD THAT USG IS CONSIDER-
ING ESTABLISHMENT REGIONAL TRANSIT CENTER IN PHILIP-
PINES OR MACAU, HE PROBABLY WILL NOW MOVE SLOWLY TOWARD
ESTABLISHING A UNHCR FACILITY IN MACAU TO RELIEVE
PRESSURE IN HONG KONG SINCE A USG-SPONSORED
FACILITY IN EITHER PLACE COULD SERVE THIS PURPOSE.
THIS WOULD SEEM TO ARGUE FOR A QUICK DECISION ONE
WAY OR THE OTHER ON THE PROPOSAL NOW UNDER CONSIDERA-
TION. WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT THE ESTABLISHMENT
OF A REGIONAL CENTER IN THE PHILIPPINES OR MACAU
MAKES GOOD SENSE IN TERMS OF RELIEVING PRESSURE
ON HONG KONG AS WELL AS MALAYSIA AND THAILAND.
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